DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 333 273 CG 023 427

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TITLE Anabolic Steroids...What's the Hype?...
INSTITUTION Wisconsin Clearinghouse, Madison.
PUB DATE 90
NOTE 11p.
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070)

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS *Athletes; *Drug Use; *Illegal Drug Use
IDENTIFIERS *Steroids

ABSTRACT

This pamphlet uses a question-and-answer format to examine the use and abuse of anabolic steroids. It begins by explaining that all steroids are not anabolic steroids and that anabolic steroids are those used specifically to build muscles quickly. Medical uses of anabolic steroids are reviewed; how people get steroids, how they take them, and their effectiveness are discussed. Side effects of anabolic steroid use are considered and an accompanying chart lists harmful side effects related to reproduction, skin and hair, the cardiovascular system, kidneys, liver, psychological characteristics, and other harmful effects. Permanent side effects that do not disappear when anabolic steroid use is stopped are distinguished from temporary side effects. The possibility of anabolic steroid addiction is addressed. The pamphlet concludes with a toll-free telephone number that readers can call to obtain more information about anabolic steroids. (NB)

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ANABOLIC STEROIDS

...what's the hype?...

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What are anabolic steroids?

Anabolic steroids—often called *'roids, the juice, pump, hype,* or simply *steroids*—are powerful drugs used to build muscles fast. The term anabolic means "to build protein." All of the over 100 different types of anabolic steroids are chemically related to the male sex hormone testosterone.

Many athletes now illegally use these steroids. However, use of them is a serious problem. Anabolic steroids can alter your mood, lead to dependency or addiction, and cause a wide range of temporary and permanent harmful effects.

Are all steroids anabolic?

No. Steroids are a broad class of chemicals which include cortisones, the male hormone testosterone, some female sex hormones, and even cholesterol. Doctors use cortisones to reduce the inflammation and swelling that occur when the body's immune system has been stimulated. For example, cortisone is very helpful for some allergies. When you hear the term steroid, you must be careful that you know which type people are talking about. In this pamphlet, when we use the word steroid we mean anabolic steroid.

What are the medical uses of steroids?

Doctors use steroids for the treatment of some cancers, rare blood disorders, and for males who for some reason are unable to produce adequate amounts of testosterone.

What's the type

How are steroids taken?

Steroids can be taken by mouth in pill form or by injection with syringes and needles. Pills are easier to take, but their effects do not last as long. They are taken daily. Injectable steroids last longer so a person only has to get a "shot" once or twice a week.

People who use steroids often take both forms at the same time. This is called "stacking." In theory, stacking is supposed to be better at improving someone's strength than just taking either form of the drug alone. However, there is no evidence to support this idea.

How do people get steroids?

Doctors and some other health providers can legally prescribe steroids. Most doctors believe it is wrong to prescribe these drugs for nonmedical purposes. In some states this is illegal. Many people unfortunately obtain steroids illegally from another user in the gym. These black market steroids are expensive. Like other street drugs, their purity, dose levels and safety is often in doubt. Many states are considering curtailing their use and punishing offenders.

Do steroids work?

Only under the right conditions. The most recent and best studies show that with the right diet and a lot of hard weight training, steroids can build muscle faster than with hard work alone. A common myth, however, is that steroids can take the place of hard work. They can't.

Steroids used without medical supervi-

Harmful Side Effects from Anabolic Steroids

*[Items with a * are permanent side effects that do not disappear after you stop using steroids.]*

Reproductive System/Males:
shrinking of testicles
sterility (inability to produce sperm for up to 7 months after ending use)
impotence (inability to get an erection)
cancer of the prostate (the gland that makes semen)*
enlargement of the prostate causing difficulties in urinating

Reproductive System/Females:
loss of periods (menses)
enlargement of clitoris*
birth defects in unborn child*

Skin and Hair
acne
baldness*
increase in body hair*

Cardiovascular System
increase in blood cholesterol
decrease in HDL (protective blood fat)
increased risk of heart disease and heart attacks
increased blood pressure

Kidneys
cancer*

Liver
jaundice
blood filled cysts (pelosis hepatitis)
tumors—some cancerous*
blockage of bile ducts

Psychological
depression
mood swings
aggressive behavior
psychosis (hallucinations)
manic behavior

Other
growth of female-like breast tissue in males (gynecomastia)*
shrinkage of breast tissue in females
deepening of voice*
swelling of face
rashes
bone pain
chills
gall stones
headaches
insomnia
nausea or vomiting
stunted growth in children

sion can cause a wide range of health problems. These problems far outweigh possible benefits.

Are there side effects from using steroids?

Yes, lots of them, as the accompanying table shows. The side effects vary greatly from person to person. However, the higher the dose and the longer the use, the more likely a person will have harmful side effects.

Generally, the side effects of steroids are similar to the effects of the male hormone testosterone. They stimulate the formation of masculine characteristics in developing males. These characteristics include deepening of the voice, increase in body hair, and enlargement (before puberty) of the male genitalia.

Which of these side effects should someone be concerned about the most?

People who use steroids are at greater risk of injuries. It appears that users are more likely to get muscle pulls, tendon ruptures and certain kinds of fractures.

Males who use steroids and who have not passed through puberty are likely to experience a growth in their genitalia. However, users who have passed puberty will likely experience a shrinkage in their genitalia.

Users who inject steroids and share needles increase their risk of contracting hepatitis and the virus which causes AIDS.

Using steroids may increase the chances of developing some kinds of cancer. Steroids can cause cancerous tumors of the liver. At least 50 people using ste-

roids have gotten liver cancer. Users also are more likely to have tumors of the kidneys and prostate (the gland in men which produces semen). The long term risks for kidney and prostate cancer are not known.

Steroids can cause high blood pressure and increase the risk of heart attacks. This is especially true if a person's blood pressure is slightly high before using steroids. Although blood pressure goes down when a person stops using steroids, users place themselves in greater danger while using.

One of the most common side effects of steroids is a rise in lipids, or fats, in the blood. Steroids raise cholesterol in the blood. They also lower the amount of HDL, a substance in the blood which protects the arteries from getting plugged up. This combination increases the chances of heart attacks and strokes. As with blood pressure, these side effects go away when someone stops using steroids. But again, users are placing themselves at risk.

Is it true that people get pretty crabby while using steroids?

Steroids make people more aggressive. This may help to make people work harder and longer but it often creates major problems for them in other areas of their lives. Spouses, friends and teammates of users often complain that users have mood swings and are very difficult to get along with while using. This increase in aggression and moodiness has become known as *'roid rage*.

Many users become depressed, have psychotic thoughts, and feel manic.

Doctors aren't sure if these effects go away completely after someone stops using.

Which of these side effects are permanent?

Several side effects are known to be permanent. Some males and females lose the hair on top of their head. This hair does not grow back after steroid use stops. The growth of female-like breast tissue in some males also may not disappear completely without surgery. Females who use steroids are more likely to have a permanent increase in facial hair and other body hair, deepening of the voice, or enlargement of the clitoris.

Can you become addicted to steroids?

Yes. Many people cannot stop using even when they want to. Abruptly stopping the use of steroids can cause a depression severe enough to lead to suicide. To avoid feeling down, people may continue to use the drug even when they no longer want the muscle building effects.

Why then do people still use steroids?

Some athletes dream of becoming professional and making lots of money. They may think steroids will help them do that. Some start using because they feel they must use to win. Most people start using steroids because they hope to become bigger and stronger at any cost. They are willing to risk the side effects. Or they may think the side effects will not happen to them at all.

But aren't steroids sometimes needed for that competitive edge?

No. It is a myth that it is necessary to use steroids to compete. Countless numbers of professional and amateur athletes and other people have enjoyed great success without the use of steroids. And countless numbers have used steroids and lost. It is not necessarily true that using steroids will build muscle or improve performance.

Many amateur and professional competitive sports associations forbid the use of steroids. You've heard of many athletes whose use of steroids has cost them their titles.

How can I find out more about steroids?

Steroids are powerful drugs with many side effects. Using these steroids is risky and can be very dangerous. If you, a friend or teammate need more information on steroids, you can go to several places. You can speak with your family doctor. Your school coaches or student assistance program may be able to help. Many communities have drug information agencies. Look in the yellow pages under "drug" or "drug abuse." You can also call 1–800–662–4357.

You can help friends and teammates by your own example. Athletes are often leaders at school. Your fellow students probably look up to you and value your opinion. If you know someone who is using steroids, share this information with them. Encourage them to talk with a professional about their use. Finally, help others decide not to use steroids by refusing to use them yourself.

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